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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 GUATEMALA 000962

SIPDIS

HARARE FOR BRUCE WHARTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PREL KJUS GT

SUBJECT: OMINOUS SIGNS COME IN THREES: LATEST HUMAN RIGHTS SETBACKS

REF: A. 02 GUATEMALA 3160

1B. 02 GUATEMALA 3213

1C. 02 GUATEMALA 3275

1D. GUATEMALA 884

11. (U) Both in the capital and farther afield, new human rights concerns are popping up in Guatemala. To the north, in Quiche, a Mayan priest and human rights activist was murdered; to the east, in Izabal, the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDH) Auxiliary office was ransacked; here in the Guatemala City, the home of Nineth Montenegro (New Nation Alliance (ANN) Congresswoman and Mutual Support Group (GAM) founder) and Mario Polanco (GAM Director) was robbed. Embassy inquiries and efforts to support activists continue, as shown in the Peccerelli case, but deteriorating security conditions and governmental apathy remain troubling. End Summary.

#### Violence Strikes Again in Quiche

12. (U) Diego Xon Salazar, a Mayan priest, was found dead Saturday, April 5, in Quiche province. Xon Salazar had reportedly been receiving death threats due to his active role in GAM, a human rights NGO, and his protest of the resurgence of the ex-civilian patrollers (ex-PACs) in war-torn Quiche. GAM is denouncing the GOG for knowledge of death threats against Xon Salazar and refusal to provide protection. An investigation of his death remains pending. This is the second murder of a Mayan indigenous activist in six months, the first being Antonio Pop Caal of Alta Verapaz in October 2002. (Ref A)

#### Auxiliary Ombudsmen at Risk?

13. (U) Waldemar Barerra, Auxiliary Ombudsman in Izabal province, reported that he was assaulted and his offices ransacked in early April. Barerra reported that his investigation reports and computer equipment were stolen, but valuable items were left behind, leading him to believe that the thieves were politically and not economically motivated. Barerra's office has been involved in a number of high profile cases, such as the Chocon case, involving the former anti-narcotics police, and the murder of journalist Mynor Alegria, as well as the investigation of many campesino killings. (Ref B)

#### Domestic Tranquility Shattered

14. (U) Professionally active and powerful, yet personally private, duo Nineth Montenegro and Mario Polanco were victimized on April 7, when five armed men stormed their home and robbed them of property valued over 100,000 quetzals (12,500 dollars) and issued threats to Polanco, who was in Geneva with a delegation of human rights leaders. Montenegro is an outspoken leftist congresswomen known for her work against impunity and for transparency. Polanco is the Director of GAM and is very involved with the human right's movement's proposal for a Commission to Investigate Illegal Bodies and the Clandestine Security Apparatus (CICIACS). (Ref C)

15. (U) The Ambassador called Montenegro on April 7, to express our concern and to inform her that he had spoken with both Minister of Government Reyes Calderon and Police Chief Manchame to push for a quick investigation and immediate police protection of Montenegro, Polanco, and their family. Montenegro thanked the Ambassador and promised to inform the Embassy of further developments. DCM and Human Rights poloff met with Vice Minister of Government Caceres on April 10 and pressed him to provide all possible protections.

#### Peccerelli Update

16. (U) Following-up on Ambassador's March 31 meeting with Minister of Government Reyes Calderon (Ref D), DCM and HROff escorted Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG) Director Fredy Peccerelli to a meeting with Vice Minister of Government Caceres. DCM thanked Caceres for the police protection the MOG has provided the FAFG in the past, and

asked him to consider the personal details and perimeter security that Peccerelli requested in response to recent death threats. Caceres agreed to do so immediately and faxed the Embassy a copy of his official order to the police for Peccerelli's protection within three hours of the meeting.

Comment

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17. (U) While deflating, these recent attacks re-enforce the need for continued USG pressure to push for the protection of human rights in the Capital and in the countryside. We will continue to lobby the GOG for investigations of these egregious murders and robberies, as well as protection for those human rights leaders and government entities who soldier on despite such glaring obstacles and setbacks.

HAMILTON